

**Why We Pray**  
**John 17: 6 – 26**  
**Preached by Dr. Cahill**  
**Babcock Presbyterian Church**  
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Last Sunday, the sermon was about what prayer is and what prayer isn't. Prayer plays an essential role in our relationship with God and each other. We have to get it right if our prayers are going to nurture the quality of our lives spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

But we shouldn't pray just for ourselves. We should also pray for each other so our prayers nurture the quality of our lives relationally. Remember, our relationships with God and each other are an essential part of God's unfolding plan for the coming of Christ's Kingdom.

Here's a brief review of the three things we need to know about prayer.

First, prayer helps us become aware of God's presence around and within us. In other words, prayer helps us become nearer to God so we can be with God. We take comfort in knowing God is with us but we have to take care that we are with God. Friendship with God is a two-way street and through prayer, we do our part to keep the lines of communication open.

Second, prayer helps us get in sync with God's will. This is fundamental. The sooner we realize we can't always get what we want, the better off we'll be. Yes, that's a hard and terrible lesson to learn. When our most ardent prayers aren't answered we can get angry and decide praying is a bunch of bunk.

That's why the Gospels include the story of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Just hours before his crucifixion he prayed to his father for release from his calling to be the suffering Christ. "Abba, Father, take this cup of suffering away from me... nevertheless not my will but yours be done."

It seems Jesus didn't get what he asked for, until we remember Jesus prayed for God's will to be done. He began his prayer begging for his life. He ended his prayer recommitted to laying down his life. So you see, we need to pray, not to get what we want but to learn what God wants. It's a hard lesson to learn, but when we come to our senses and submit to God's will, life does get less complicated.

Third, prayer prepares us, and others, for the coming of God's kingdom on earth. I'll say it again, prayer should never be limited to what we want for ourselves, our families and friends. God also wants us to pray for the coming of Christ's Kingdom, not just at the end times but especially during our times.

Most of Jesus' teaching centered on the reality of God's Kingdom all around us. The Kingdom is already here, but unless we become aware of God's presence and get in sync with God's will, we can't see the kingdom passing us by.

Prayer empowers believers to be aware of the Kingdom. Then we can become agents of God's will. Remember whenever God's will is done, on earth as it is in heaven, the Kingdom of God comes near to impact our lives and equally important, the lives of others.

Submitting to God's will through prayer can be done alone and with others. Jesus taught, pray by yourselves, but also make time to pray with others. That's why we have the Sunday night prayer meeting. You may be wondering why one person's prayer isn't enough to get God's attention.

It's not necessary to have large numbers praying to get God's attention but praying with others is a powerful experience. Whenever you feel the urge to pray with others, that's God's way of letting you know we aren't isolated and alone. Corporate prayer enforces our sense of belonging to the beloved community. There's strength in numbers, reminding us we're all in this together.

In John's Gospel we read about Jesus' last hours in the Upper Room just before his crucifixion. Jesus used this time for final instructions and affirmations because he knew the disciples would soon be on their own.

This was also a time for Jesus to pray for them. In his own words, "I pray on behalf of those who believe in me through their witness." (That means you and me.)

Every Sunday, the prayer confession is followed up with a declaration of pardon. One of these declarations remind us that Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn us but to live for us, die for us, be raised in power for us, (and finally) to pray for us.

Christ prays for us by praying through us.

At Christmas we celebrate the mystery of the incarnation, "the word became flesh to live among us filled with grace and truth." (John 1: 14) The incarnation wasn't just a one-time event frozen in history. Instead, Christ becomes flesh in us whenever we offer up our time and energy to accomplish God's will.

Whenever you make the decision to live and pray for Christ, Christ lives and prays through you. The mystery of the incarnation perpetually unfolds and expands in and through us. We are being transformed into agents of God's grace.

Jesus prayer in the upper room is found in John 17 and can be subdivided into three distinct sections:

First, Jesus prayed about his own relationship with God father.

Next, Jesus prayed for the 12 disciples and their relationship with him and the father.

Finally, Jesus prayed for us and our relationship with God so the world will know through our words and actions God's will for humanity.

I'll now focus on that third part of Jesus prayer, because it tells how Jesus is already praying for us and through us as members of his church.

Years ago Walter Brugeman, a distinguished Biblical scholar delivered an address at a church conference. His talk can be boiled down to one phrase, "Are we going to make it or blow it?" Every day we need to ask ourselves that question. "Am I making it or blowing it as a spouse, parent, son or daughter? Am I making it as a human being created in the image of God, or am I blowing it?"

The answers to those questions depend on the frequency and quality of our prayers. You and I can't offer ourselves up as living sacrifices without first submitting to God's will. And always remember this, when we pray, our prayers are fortified by the prayers of Christ. You see, it's not just our prayers making the difference. Christ praying for us makes the difference.

Jesus prayed we would never be overcome by the world. "Holy Father, protect them... when I was with them I protected them... I guarded them... but now I am coming back to you... I have given them your word and the world hates them because they don't belong to the world. I am not asking you take them out of the world but I asked you to protect them from the evil one." (John 17: 11 – 15)

The word "world" in John's Gospel can be defined as, "human society (including governments, economic systems, cultural norms and philosophies) organizing outside of and often in opposition to God's will."

It's tempting, being charmed by the world system and it's easy to give into that temptation. That's why Christ prays for us when we don't pray for ourselves. But knowing Christ prays for us doesn't get us off the hook.

Remember what I said last Sunday, prayer, fierce conversations with God, is essential to being connected to the source. We need to pray as much as we need to breath so we can pray for ourselves, our families and friends but also, as Gene Peterson put it in his translation of the New Testament, "the lost confused people in our neighborhood," people as lost and confused as we are minus God's love and grace.

In the Upper Room, Jesus finally prayed for our unity with God and each other. Sometimes you hear about married couples so in sync with each other they can complete each other sentences.

You've also heard the expression, "I can read you like a book." Jesus wants us to become so intimate with God that we instinctively know God's deepest desires for us and the world he loves.

All this is what separates, "my will be done," from "thy will be done." This is what separates wishes from prayers and God's eternal kingdom from the lost world. Prayer makes the difference.

You'll know your prayers are spot on when you resolve to put yourself on the line for Christ and his kingdom in ways that make you feel terribly uncomfortable. But let's be honest, being comforted and comfortable isn't all there is to life.

At the end of John's Gospel Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me... do you love me more than these?"

Every day, you and I are asked, "Do you love Jesus more than these? Do you put Jesus above your desire for personal security, comfort and control?"

Every day Jesus asks the same question and every day Jesus waits for us to give the right answer because how you and I answer that question determines the quality of our character and the direction of our lives.

I urge you to expand your prayers as you wait for God's kingdom come near so that you and the people you pray for come nearer to God. Amen.